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OKEFENOKEE SWAMP IN GEORGIA
BECOMES U. S. WILDLIFE HAVEN

U. S. Biological Survey to Preserve Natural Wilderness
of "Land of Trembling Earth"; Rare Birds and
Animals to Get Federal Protection

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The vast primeval wilderness of the Okefenokee Swamp in southeastern Georgia where the ivory-billed woodpecker, limpkin or "crying bird", otter, and other fast-dwindling wild birds and animals still find refuge, will be maintained as a wildlife sanctuary by the Biological Survey of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. It has been named the Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge.

A total of 479,450 acres in Charlton, Clinch, and Ware Counties has been included in the ultimate boundary by an Executive order establishing the refuge. The Biological Survey already has acquired 293,825 acres of this land. Little development work will be undertaken there as the Survey plans to preserve the swamp in its natural state. Visitors will be required to obtain permits from refuge officials to visit areas set aside for the public. Hunting and trapping will not be permitted, but on certain areas designated by the Secretary of Agriculture, regulated fishing will be allowed. The only roads planned on the refuge will lead to the headquarters buildings and boat landings that are to be built.

Although lumbering operations have removed much of the salable timber from the swamp there are still tracts of diversified territory that have not been touched by lumbermen and are still primeval in appearance. Purchases by the Biological Survey include these wilderness areas, which offer naturalists splendid opportunity for faunal and ecological studies.

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"Establishment of the Okefenokee Refuge", says Dr. I. N. Gabrielson, Chief of the Survey, "insures the preservation for posterity of one of the most interesting natural features of our country. Among the fresh-water swamps east of the Mississippi river it is exceeded only in size by the Everglades, and its variety and richness in animal and plant life have few, if any, counterparts."

The swamp is largely a wet timbered area containing an uneven stand of cypress, gum, bay, and red maple, with such undergrowth as greenbrier and ti-ti bush. Most of the cypress trees are festooned with Spanish moss. Within the swamp are many marshlike open spaces, locally called "prairies." They contain scattered hummocks covered with cypress trees or brush, which in some instances extend over a thousand acres. Also there are many islands that are fairly high and dry. Timber, composed chiefly of longleaf and slash pines, surrounds the swamp.

Seminole Indians, according to legends, sought refuge in the swamp and named it Okefenokee, which means "land of the trembling earth." Masses of plants have grown so closely together there that they appear to be solid ground, but stepping on the bog causes it to tremble.

Studies by the Biological Survey during the last five years show that this area is becoming increasingly important for waterfowl. At least 11 species visit the swamp during the year. The wood duck is a year-round inhabitant, and in recent years thousands of ring-necked ducks have adopted the swamp as their winter home. Mallards, pintails, black ducks, hooded mergansers, and green-winged teal are among other kinds of waterfowl that winter there.

The great ivory-billed woodpecker, now on the verge of extinction, has maintained in the Okefenokee Swamp one of its last strongholds. On the other hand, the pileated woodpecker, scarcely less splendid than the ivorybill, is abundant there. The American egret, once nearly exterminated for its plumes, breeds and winters in the swamp. The area also is one of the few places in Georgia where

the sandhill crane and the limpkin, or "crying bird", are still found. The cranes are numerous, but the limpkins few. The swamp is about the northern limit of the limpkin's present breeding range.

The alligator, threatened with extermination by hide hunters, will find the Okefenokee a good refuge. The swamp waters also abound in fish life, including pickerel, large-mouthed and other basses, short-nosed gar, chub sucker, mudfish, catfish, and killifishes. Among other forms of wildlife that live there are the otter, white-tailed deer, black bear, wildcat, skunk, round-tail muskrat, raccoon, opossum, wood ibis, Ward's heron, water turkey, bobwhite quail, and many less conspicuous species, some of which are limited in their distribution to the swamp.

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